

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/DECISION RECORD

EA Number: AZ-040-2005-0007

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: N/A

BLM Office: Safford Field Office

DECISION:

It is my decision to implement the proposed action as described and stipulated in the West Bonita Rim Road Corrective Maintenance Environmental Assessment, AZ-040-2005-0007. Implementing the proposed road improvements provide resource protection and deferred maintenance, improve public safety and vehicle access, and reduce scheduled road maintenance costs. The proposed action resolves defined issues, meets the purpose and need for action and would not affect any critical elements and other resources described within the environmental assessment.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Based upon the West Bonita Rim Road Corrective Maintenance Environmental Assessment, AZ-040-2005-0007, I conclude that this action is in conformance with the approved land use plan, Safford District Resource Management Plan and the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area. Implementation of the proposed action will result in no significant impact to the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

MITIGATION/STIPULATIONS:

Cultural and Paleontological Resource

1. Any archaeological or historical artifacts or remains, or vertebrate fossils discovered during construction, maintenance and use shall be left intact and undisturbed; all work in the area shall stop immediately and the Program Manager for Planning and Monitoring shall be notified immediately. Commencement of operations shall be allowed upon clearance by the Program Manager.
2. An additional cultural and paleontological resource survey may be required in the event that the project location is changed or additional surface disturbing operations are added to the project after the initial survey. Any such survey would have to be completed prior to commencement of operations.
3. If in connection with operations under this authorization, any human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects of cultural patrimony as defined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (P.L. 101-601; Stat. 3048; U.S.C. 3001) are discovered, the permittee shall stop operations in the immediate area of the discovery, protect the remains and objects, and immediately notify the Program Manager of the discovery. The permittee shall continue to protect the immediate area of the discovery until notified by the Program manager that operations may resume.

Special Cultural Stipulation

Archaeological sites CC:2:234(ASM) located on T5S,R27E,S35 on the West Bonita Road shall be avoided by all construction, corrective maintenance, blading, resurfacing, and disturbance during construction activities. The site boundaries will be flagged with orange flagging at the road and construction personnel will be instructed to avoid the area between the flagging.

General Project Stipulations

1. Force Account crew is responsible for controlling vehicular traffic at the construction site during both work and non-work hours. Non-work hour traffic control and public safety shall be provided through cautionary signing and other control methods.
2. Project work would occur on week days reducing visitor access conflicts.
3. All equipment and vehicles shall be power washed before going to the site to lessen the chance of introducing noxious weeds.
4. All vehicles shall remain on existing roads, parking areas, turn-arounds, or disturbed sites unless involved in work on a site authorized for disturbance.
5. *All work must be performed with the intention to incur only the minimum amount of disturbance necessary to achieve the objectives.*
6. Excess fill material must be spread in a thin layer over the terrain, on the road surface or removed from the site.
7. Rehabilitation work including site clean-up, seeding, mulching and vertical mulching, matting, water control devices, and other measures would be provided should unauthorized disturbance occur.

COMPLIANCE MONITORING:

Safford Field Office staff, Force Account, and Law Enforcement Rangers will monitor and document road maintenance needs on an as needed basis.

/Bonnie Winslow/
Safford Field Office Assistant Manager
Planning, Monitoring and Gila Box RNCA

Date: December 20, 2004

West Bonita Rim Road Corrective Maintenance Environmental Assessment

AZ-040-2005-0007

**Bureau of Land Management
Safford Field Office
Gila Box Riparian
National Conservation Area**

**Prepared by:
Jeff Wilbanks
Outdoor Recreation Planner
December 14, 2004**

West Bonita Rim Road Corrective Maintenance Environmental Assessment

EA Number: AZ-040-2005-0007

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: N/A

Applicant: Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

BLM Office: Safford Field Office

Location of Proposed Action: R.27E., T.5S., Sec. 36,35,34,27; R.28E., T.6S., Sec. 8 and 17; Gila and Salt River Meridian; see attached maps.

EA Team Leader: Jeff Wilbanks, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area (RNCA).

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLAN

The Proposed Action is subject to the following land use plan:

Name of Plan: Safford District Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved: Record of Decision Part I, September 1992; Record of Decision Part II, July 1994.

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the applicable land use plan:

CHECK ONE

(X) YES () NO

TA07 Reconstruct the following roads to provide or improve vehicle access for administration and use of the public lands. Three miles of Left Fork of Markham Creek Road, Three miles of Military trail, one half mile of Virgus Canyon Road, Five and one half miles of Jackson Cabin Road, one mile of Buckeye Canyon Road, and *other roads* as determined in the future to be included in the District Transportation Plan. RMP page 27.

Name of Plan: Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area Management Plan

Date Approved: Decision Record, December 19, 1997. This plan is tiered to the Safford District RMP. The Gila Box Plan is available on CD at the Safford Field Office.

Designated Road Network West Bonita Rim Road is selected for scheduled and corrective maintenance (page 15).

PURPOSE/NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION

Purpose of the proposed action is to provide corrective road maintenance for the West Bonita

Rim Road enhancing public safety and vehicle access, protecting resources and reducing the frequency for scheduled road maintenance and associated costs. West Bonita Rim Road provides vehicle access to the northwestern portion of the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area (RNCA) including Lee Trailhead and Bonita Creek.

Currently, the road is rocky and uneven requiring a high clearance vehicle for access. The road passes through four pasture fences. Two of these fences contain wire gates, one has a non-functioning cattle guard and the fourth fence does not have a wire gate or cattle guard. The proposed action would install four cattle guards eliminating the need for passengers exiting their vehicle to open and close the gates. Also, the cattle guards would eliminate the problem of gates being left open allowing livestock to spread into unauthorized areas. The proposed action would also provide road surface material making a smoother more functional access road.

The RNCA is directed by Congress to conserve, protect and enhance riparian and associated values including aquatic, wildlife, archeological, paleontological, scientific, cultural, recreational, educational, and scenic. The proposed action would assist in accomplishing this goal.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action

The section of West Bonita Rim Road identified for corrective maintenance is located between the intersections of Salt Trap Road and Kearny Camp Road. The proposed action would provide road surface material to the 2 miles of road between Solomon Pass Road and Salt Trap Road. The second portion of this project is to install 4 cattle guards as identified on the attached map.

Road surface material would be purchased and hauled to West Bonita Rim Road. All road surface maintenance activities would be limited to the existing road disturbance including the burms. The road surface would first be bladed then material dumped onto the surface, followed by spreading and watering. Brush and limbs would be removed up to 3 feet from the road berm and placed in drainages to reduce erosion. Barrel cactus growing within the berm would be relocated at least 3 feet from the road. Relocated cactus should be planted next to another plant or vertical mulching. Barrel cactus within the 3 foot trimming area would remain in place.

Installation of the cattle guards would require a disturbance area of approximately 50ft. by 50ft. The majority of installation work, digging the 8ft by 14ft. hole for the cattle guard, would take place on the road well within the 50ft. by 50ft. area. The remainder of the disturbance area is for equipment turn-around and leveling. Cattle guard number 3 requires removal of a non-functional cattle guard before installation of the new cattle guard. The cattle guards need new wing fences to tie into the existing fence line. Material generated on site would be used as fill around the cattle guards or on the road surface. Excess material must be spread in a thin layer over the terrain or removed from the site.

The project is scheduled for February, 2005. Safford Force Account crew would provide the labor and equipment for the project including pick-up trucks, chain saws, dump truck, front end loader, road grader and water truck. All vehicles would remain on existing roads, parking areas, turn-arounds, or disturbed sites unless working on a site authorized for disturbance.

All equipment and vehicles would be power washed before going to the site to lessen the chance of introducing noxious weeds. Project work would occur on week days reducing visitor access conflicts. The crew would be responsible for controlling traffic flow through or around work sites during both work and non-work hours. Non-work hour traffic flow and public safety would be provided through cautionary signing and other traffic control methods. Rehabilitation work including seeding, mulching and vertical mulching, matting, water control devices, and other measures would be provided for authorized or unauthorized disturbance. Project rehabilitation would have a biologist input. *All work must be performed with the intention to incur only the minimum amount of disturbance necessary to achieve the objectives.*

BLM manages the scenic viewshed as seen from the West Bonita Rim Road as a Visual Resource Management, Class II designation. This classification provides guidelines to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change allowed to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Changes must repeat the basic element of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristics landscape.

No Action Alternative

No Action Alternative provides the current level of routine BLM road maintenance. Continue to post signs on the wire gates requesting visitors to close the gate after passing through the fence.

Unauthorized livestock grazing would continue due to wire gates being left open, livestock passing over the existing non-functional cattle guard and livestock passing through the fence where there is no cattle guard or gate.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Scoping/Screening Session

The following people have been involved with coordination meetings to discuss and resolve project issues.

Bonnie Winslow, Safford Field Office (SFO), Assistant Field Office Manager
Ron Peru, SFO, Engineering Technician
Anna Rago, SFO, Archeologist
Dan McGrew, SFO, Archeologist
Michelle Cox, Rangeland Specialist
Jeff Menges, Allotment Permittee
Jeff Wilbanks, Outdoor Recreation Planner.

Issues Identified in Scoping

Proposed Action

The following issues identified through the issue identification process are carried forward for additional analysis:

Vegetation- Removing or trimming vegetation will create waste cuttings and barrel cactus may be located within 3 feet and including of the road berms.

Soil- Disturbance would be produced on the road bed, road berms and within the 50ft. by 50ft. area adjacent to the road.

Water Quality- Storm run-off may carry sediment from newly disturbed areas until these areas compact.

Cultural- Archeologist will survey project sites before work begins.

Range- Allotment permittee will be contacted to receive input and concurrence for the proposal.

Recreation- Road maintenance may delay vehicle traffic and disrupt recreation activities.

Visual Resource Management (VRM)- The fresh disturbance and cattle guards may produce visual impacts.

The following critical elements were examined during the review process: None were found affected.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS (required by federal law)	AFFECTED		CRITICAL ELEMENTS (required by federal law)	AFFECTED	
	YES	NO		YES	NO
ACECS		X	Solid Waste		X
Air Quality		X	VRM		X
Cultural Resources		X	Water Quality		X
Environmental Justice/ Socioeconomics		X	Wetland/Riparian		X
Hazardous Materials		X	Wilderness		X
Flood Plains		X	Wild & Scenic River		X
Native American Religious Concerns.		X	T&E Animal Species		X
Nonnative/Invasive Plants		X	T&E Plant Species		X
Prime/Unique Farmlands		X			

Issues Identified in Scoping

No Action Alternative

The following issues identified through the issue identification process are carried forward for additional analysis:

Public Safety/Vehicle Access- Existing routine maintenance will not resolve the current road adequacy concerns with the West Bonita Rim Road.

Range- Livestock can gain access to areas unauthorized for grazing when visitors leave wire gates open, or where cattle guards are non-functional, or where cattle guards are needed and are not installed.

The following critical elements were examined during the review process: None were found affected.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS (required by federal law)	AFFECTED		CRITICAL ELEMENTS (required by federal law)	AFFECTED	
	YES	NO		YES	NO
ACECS		X	Solid Waste		X
Air Quality		X	VRM		X
Cultural Resources		X	Water Quality		X
Environmental Justice/ Socioeconomics		X	Wetland/Riparian		X
Hazardous Materials		X	Wilderness		X
Flood Plains		X	Wild & Scenic River		X
Native American Religious Concerns.		X	T&E Animal Species		X
Nonnative/Invasive Plants		X	T&E Plant Species		X
Prime/Unique Farmlands		X			

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS

Proposed Action

Vegetation- Typical vegetation in the project area includes; prickly pear, barrel cactus, hedge hog, pencil cholla, creosote, ocotillo, and palo verde. Vegetation may be removed/trimmed within 3 feet of the road. Barrel cactus would be relocated if in harms way. Disturbed sites would be reseeded with native vegetation.

Soil- Soil and rock on the road bed and within the berm would be disturbed. Also, soil from the cattle guard holes (8ft. by 14ft.) would be displaced and used on the road or at the cattle guard site for fill.

Water Quality- The newly disturbed areas may produce a temporary increase in sediment load should rain occur before the site stabilizes. Force Account would use a water truck to assist with disturbed site stabilization.

Cultural- Known cultural properties within the project area would be completely avoided.

Recreation- Road maintenance crew and work activities may temporarily disturb visitor access, recreation activities and visitor experiences. Vehicle access and recreation activities would continue, although there could be periodic delays while work is underway. The proposal would improve vehicle access and visitor safety on the West Bonita Rim Road. Increases in visitor use may occur as a direct result from improved vehicle access.

Visual Resource Management (VRM)- The proposal would visually blend with the surrounding view shed. Roads and development are already present within the view shed. The proposed road maintenance and cattle guard installation would not create additional visual impacts.

The proposed project area visual resources are managed through the VRM Class II designation guidelines. Class II is the most restrictive containing these guidelines: Retain the existing character of the landscape. Change should be moderate. May attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes must repeat the basic element of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristics landscape.

No Action Alternative

Visitor access and public safety issues and range concerns identified in the scoping process of the No Action Alternative would not be resolved. The No Action Alternative provides only the existing level of routine maintenance with no improvements for the road.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Proposed Action

Management actions on pages 9-30 in the final Gila Box National Riparian Conservation Area Plan (BLM 1998) (available for review at the Safford Field Office) are being implemented, and are altering the cumulative human impacts to the area. Cumulative impacts have been analyzed in the final Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area Plan, Environmental Assessment (pages 44-56).

Facilities such as Riverview and Owl Canyon Campgrounds, Lee Trailhead, Serna Cabin, Old Safford Bridge Picnic Area, and Gila River Boat Launch Area have already been constructed. Designated roads and signing has been established and high impact roads in riparian areas closed. The designated roads contribute in varying degrees to the existing visual resource impacts. The additional development including the proposed action would contribute little to the cumulative impacts in and around the RNCA.

No Action Alternative

No additional cumulative impacts would be realized through the No Action Alternative. The management actions for routine road maintenance are already being implemented throughout the RNCA. Cumulative impacts for routine road maintenance have been analyzed in the final Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area Plan, Environmental Assessment (pages 44-56).

MITIGATION/STIPULATION MEASURES

Cultural and Paleontological Resource

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AGENCIES and INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED

Safford Field Office and Gila Box RNCA staffs.
Jeff Menges- Allotment permittee

References Cited

BLM 1991. Safford District Resource Management Plan, Environmental Impact Statement. Safford, AZ: BLM Safford Field Office.

BLM 1998. Gila Box Management Plan, Environmental Assessment and Decision Record. Safford, AZ: BLM Safford Field Office.

Preparer: Jeff Wilbanks, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Date: November, 26, 2004

Attachments: Project maps and Cultural Resource Compliance Documentation Record